

PCAS 19 (2016/2017)

**Critical Literature Review
(ANTA602)**

***How is Antarctica represented in juvenile fiction in
the English language?***

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Abstract (ca. 200 words):

This literature review samples the English-language juvenile fiction involving Antarctica, and looks at the representation of the continent in that fiction. It discovers that picture books largely have a simplistic representation of the continent, and generally portray it as a home for anthropomorphised penguins. As the reading-age of the books increases, the depiction gets more complex, and more human-oriented.

The children's and young adult fiction have fairly wide-ranging depictions of Antarctica, showing it as a continent for adventure, science, tourism, or exploration. They also explore both historical and modern representations of the continent.

It is interesting that very few of the books portray Antarctica as a continent for both science and peace (the two stated goals of the Antarctic Treaty (AT)), nor is

environmentalism significant in the majority of the books (an important facet of the modern Antarctic Treaty System).

It is also interesting to see the change in attitudes towards Antarctica, as reflected in works of fiction. Earlier books represent the continent as somewhere for exploration and/or exploitation. As time passes, the attitudes towards the Antarctic change. In the recent books it is mostly depicted as a place for tourism and science.

Introduction

There is a significant quantity of English-language juvenile fiction¹ set in Antarctica, and this literature review has not attempted to analyse all of it. Instead, a sample of books, across a range of both intended reading ages and publication years was evaluated. It is hoped that the books reviewed here are representative of the wider range available.

Unsurprisingly, all of the books reviewed represent² Antarctica as a cold land of snow and ice; given this commonality, the depiction of cold/snow/ice is not mentioned for specific books, unless it was exceptionally emphasised. They also all have some mention of penguins, to a lesser or greater extent. However, these are the only two commonalities within the selected books.

Picture books tend to depict Antarctica as the land of penguins – it is mostly shown as uninhabited by people, with anthropomorphised penguins instead. The Antarctic is occasionally represented as dangerous, or a place for adventure, but is generally just home for the characters in the book.

Children's books by contrast represent Antarctica in a variety of ways – some show it as dangerous and a place for exploration, while others show it as a place for adventure. It is also represented as a place for science in a number of the books. Similarly to the picture books, the main characters are often anthropomorphised animals. Almost all of them have humans on the continent, in direct contrast to the picture books, which generally do not.

Finally, the Young Adult (YA) books show Antarctica as a continent for multiple activities – science, escapism, and tourism among them. Several of the books start to tackle more complex modern-day issues, such as territorial claims and the environmental protection of the continent.

It is also interesting to see the change in attitudes towards Antarctica over time (based on publication date). Early books represent Antarctica in two ways – somewhere to explore and/or somewhere to exploit. Over time this changes to representing Antarctica as somewhere for science and tourism.

The review has been separated into three sections: Picture books, Children's books (approximately aimed at 6 to 12 year olds), and Young Adult books (approximately aimed at 12 to 16 year olds).

¹ Juvenile fiction is defined here as fiction books intended for children or teens up to the age of 16.

² Represent is defined as portraying Antarctica in a particular way – this may be anything from its physical characteristics to more nebulous characteristics attributed to the continent by people (e.g. a place to learn about yourself).

Picture Books

The picture books reviewed were generally very similar overall, mainly having anthropomorphised penguins as main characters. Overall there were few books that mentioned humans, or aspects of Antarctica other than its coldness (such as its size, windiness, or dryness). However, there was considerable variation in the portrayal of the dangers of Antarctica, and in the impression they give the reader of the continent.

From Fun to Dangerous

Starting at the most cheerful end of the spectrum, a number of the picture books represent Antarctica as a fun location. *Penguin Day* (Winteringham, 1982) is the extreme of this, representing Antarctica as a bit like a holiday camp (although it is also the penguins' normal home). In a similar vein, *Little Penguin* (Benson, 1990) depicts Antarctica as a safe environment for a young penguin to explore and play, while *Playful Penguins*³ (Grindley & Paterson, 2011) depicts the Antarctic landscape as entertaining.

There are also several books that portray Antarctica as safe, but not necessarily always fun. Alborough's *Cuddly Dudley* (1993), Brown and Taylor's *The Penguin who Wanted to Fly* (1993), and Yoon's *Penguin on Vacation* (2013), and *Penguin and Pumpkin* (2014) all fall into this category, and are similar in their representation of the Antarctic: it is home for the title characters (all penguins), who have some minor issue⁴, and a resulting non-hazardous journey.

Three of the books reviewed show Antarctica as a place of security and wonder for the characters. *Lulie the Iceberg* (Takamado no Miya & Aska, 1998) specifically mentions the continent's beauty, and "majestic and awesome splendour" (Takamado no Miya & Aska, 1998). In a similar vein, *Migaloo, The White Whale* (Wilson, 2015) and *One Day on our Blue Planet ...in the Antarctic* (Bailey, 2016) represent Antarctica as a safe haven, the former stating that "The water was teeming with life" (Wilson, 2015), while the latter's pictures show animals packed into every space on land and water.

Several of the books give a more realistic⁵ impression of Antarctica - *Mac the Macaroni* (Andrew & Lewis, 1988), *Pip the Penguin* (Cowley & Bishop, 2001), *Emily and Alfie* (Hooper & Quay, 2007), and *Dragon Loves Penguin* (Gliori, 2014) all give a similar representation of the continent. In these books, the reader feels like

³ Interestingly, this does not have anthropomorphised penguins.

⁴ Such as wanting less attention or wanting to fly.

⁵ Realistic is defined here as portraying a more rounded, less utopian view of Antarctica, with relevant hazards acknowledged (depending on the title character this may be weather, skuas, seals, or similar).

Antarctica is a land of strange landscapes and unusual terrain (from an anthropocentric perspective, as the continent has no native human population). The reader also feels like there is mild danger in the environment for the main penguin characters, which is more accurate than the earlier picture books discussed.

Finally, at the most realistic end of the spectrum, Geraghty's *Solo* (1995) is the only picture book reviewed that genuinely depicts Antarctica as potentially fatal – the main character (an anthropomorphised penguin chick) encounters dangerous situations and animals several times, and almost dies. The pictures are also semi-realistic, lending strength to the impression that Antarctica is a perilous location, even for those animals for whom it is a natural environment.

Physical Aspects of the Continent

None of the picture books reviewed give an accurate representation of the size of the Antarctic continent; most of them do not address this physical aspect at all. In fact, the only one which even makes mention of it is *Two Little Penguins Called Flapjack and Waddle* (Duquennoy & Adams, 1994). The book gives the impression that Antarctica is reasonably large, but the reader is unlikely to understand the true extent of the continent.

In terms of other aspects, all of the books reviewed simply present an incomplete picture of Antarctica⁶. Only Alborough's *Cuddly Dudley* (1993) has major flaws: the title character is a penguin, but the pictures look like the Arctic – there are trees, an Inuit character, and a log cabin. It is pleasing that this level of inaccuracy appears to be the exception for Antarctic fiction.

Humans in Antarctica

In terms of the human impact on Antarctica, most of the books either have no humans or human artefacts in them, or the humans are benign and have no impact on the environment. Two exceptions are *Two Little Penguins Called Flapjack and Waddle* (Duquennoy & Adams, 1994) and *Solo* (Geraghty, 1995), which have characters that are trapped by a fishing net.

Unusually for the Antarctic picture book genre, *A Tale of Antarctica* (Glimmerveen, 1990) shows a significant environmental impact from people; the human impact on Antarctica (from oil drilling) is represented as both severe and atrocious, with significant negative consequences to the mildly anthropomorphised penguins that

⁶ This is unsurprising, as giving a complete account of Antarctica's physical attributes is not their main goal.

live there, as well as to the landscape. Essentially, Antarctica is depicted as somewhere that humans should not be, as we will ruin it.

Finally, only two of the picture books reviewed make any mention of the historical expeditions to Antarctica, or of people on Antarctica as explorers and scientists. *Tom's Rabbit: A True Story from Scott's Last Voyage* (Hooper & Kitchen, 1998) is set in 1910, and is based on one aspect of the voyage of the *Terra Nova* – namely the rabbit Tom Crean (a sailor) looked after. Antarctica is portrayed as somewhere for adventures and explorers, but the fact it can be fatal is also recognised.

In contrast, *Something About This Place* (Finnigan, Roy, Silcock, & van der Loo, 2004) is set in the modern era, but references the early explorations of Antarctica. The continent is depicted as somewhere that history happened, somewhere that was once for explorers, and also as somewhere beautiful but potentially dangerous.

Children's Books

Unsurprisingly, the children's books reviewed have a wider variety of representations of Antarctica than the picture books. Most have people on the continent, with a variety of roles assigned to the characters (explorers, scientists, etc.). As well as a wider range of representations among the books, the children's books tend to have a wider representation in one book of the variety of Antarctic conditions and landscapes.

Simplistic Representations

Harking back to some of the picture books, Yaxley and Forsyth's *Rocky the Rockhopper Penguin* (1986) represents Antarctica as somewhere for adventures and fun for the main character, with only mild danger. No people are shown on the continent, and it is (like most of the picture books) essentially depicted as simply the penguins' home. In the same set of books (the Pacific Circle Consortium's Antarctic Project), is Phillipps and Forsyth's *The Adventures of Salik the Husky* (1986), which shows Antarctica as a continent for scientists and for excitement. Despite the differing approaches to the representation of humans in Antarctica, both books only portray mild danger on the continent.

Unusually, *Eriksson and the Mysterious Alca Impennis* (Brears, 2006) mainly describes Antarctica simply as cold. The science of the Antarctic is a very minor part of the book. Neither adventure, nor exploration, is mentioned, although the title character does experience some danger. The following quote exemplifies this book's depiction of Antarctica (Brears, 2006, p. 149):

Farewell my frozen kingdom
with your ice and snow and awe.
Your harshness, beauty and freedom
will have my heart forevermore.

A Continent of Dangerous Exploration

In stark contrast to the simplistic and generally benign representations of Antarctica in the books reviewed so far, *Like English Gentlemen* (Hodder-Williams, 1935)⁷, *The Winter Pony* (Lawrence, 2012), and *Thor's Tale: Endurance & Adventure in the Southern Ocean* (Marriott, 2006) depict Antarctica as a very harsh and dangerous environment. As all three books are based on, or around, unsuccessful historical Antarctic expeditions, this is unsurprising.

The first two books are based on Scott's expeditions in Antarctica, and mention Antarctica as somewhere for an adventure, but mainly depict the continent as for stoic explorers and heroes. What is surprising is that both books only barely mention the scientific work carried out by Scott's second expedition, despite this being a major component of the journey. *Thor's Tale* (Marriott, 2006) revolves around Shackleton's attempt to cross the Antarctic continent, with the title character meeting Shackleton and his crew before they depart for Antarctica, and again upon their return after the disastrous attempt.

Both *The Winter Pony* (Lawrence, 2012) and *Thor's Tale* (Marriott, 2006) have notes at the end of the books, detailing the parts of the story that are factual, and those that were fictional.

A Continent for Adventurers, Scientists, and Explorers

Several of the books represent Antarctica as a continent for adventure, scientists, and explorers. The oldest of these is *Frank Hardinge: From Torrid Zones to Regions of Perpetual Snow* (Stables, 1898). The book's expedition somewhat foreshadows Scott's expedition to the South Pole – the characters have a goal of reaching the South Pole, but they also want to study things, so they collect fossils and measure characteristics of the weather. More recent books representing Antarctica as somewhere for adventures, scientists, and explorers are *Mr Popper's Penguins* (Atwater, Atwater, & Lawson, 1962)⁸, *The Riddle of the Frozen Phantom* (Mahy & Mould, 2001), and *Wonder at the Edge of the World* (Helget, 2015).

⁷ This book was likely originally published around 1913 (Scott, Edinburgh, & Walkden, 2016).

⁸ This book was originally written in 1938

Omitting the idea of exploration, Sharp's *Miss Bianca in the Antarctic* (1971) depicts Antarctica as being for scientists, but also somewhere that adventures can happen, albeit accidentally, rather than seeking them out as in most of the books reviewed here.

Whilst these books depict Antarctica as more benign than those in the previous section, there is a range in how much they acknowledge its hazards. In *Frank Hardinge* (Stables, 1898), the continent is depicted as a deadly and dangerous land, also a "mighty", a "great", and a "wondrous" continent (Stables, 1898, pp. 232, 271, 305). In *Miss Bianca in the Antarctic* (Sharp, 1971), it is shown as a dangerous, possibly fatal continent, with phrases like "sucking both down and down into the pitiless, icy, Antarctic sea" (Sharp, 1971, p. 107). *Wonder at the Edge of the World* (Helget, 2015) mentions peril from the environment when in Antarctica, but does not emphasize this, whilst in *The Riddle of the Frozen Phantom* (Mahy & Mould, 2001), the continent is described as silent, strange, magical, wild, and huge at various points in the book. Finally, *Mr Popper's Penguins* (Atwater et al., 1962), does not represent Antarctica as dangerous in any way.

A Continent for Resource Extraction

In *Frank Hardinge: From Torrid Zones to Regions of Perpetual Snow* (Stables, 1898), any animal and mineral resources are available to be exploited, and preservation of the natural environment is not considered, as is normal for the time at which the book was written. Similarly, *Thor's Tale* (Marriott, 2006) and *Wonder at the Edge of the World* (Helget, 2015), explore the exploitation of the natural environment around the Antarctic, with whaling being a major component of both books.

A Continent for Peace

The only book reviewed here that touches on the peaceful aspect of Antarctica is Mahy and Mould's *The Riddle of the Frozen Phantom* (2001), with one of the characters saying that "fighting like this is insulting the Antarctic" (Mahy & Mould, 2001, p. 89).

Young Adult (YA) Books

Taking a further step into reality, the YA books reviewed dispense entirely with anthropomorphised characters, and tend to have a less adventurous tone to them, with the characters in Antarctica under somewhat realistic circumstances.

Adventurers, Scientists, and Tourists in Antarctica

On the borderline⁹ between a children's book and a YA book is *Biggles Breaks the Silence* (Johns, 2014)¹⁰, which essentially uses Antarctica as a location for an hazardous adventure.

Contrastingly, both *Troubling a Star* (L'Engle, 1994) and *Up to this Pointe* (Longo, 2016) give the impression that the main Antarctic activity is science. Unlike Biggles and adventure, science is not the focus for either book, but is instead a part of the background activity that goes on in Antarctica.

Furthermore, two of the books reviewed depict Antarctica as mainly a tourist destination – *The White Darkness* (McCaughrean, 2005) and *No Survivors: The Diary of Jackie Simms, Hamilton, 1979* (Holt, 2009). Both involve expensive flights to Antarctica; in the former they land on the continent, putatively for a three week holiday, whilst in the latter one of the characters is on the Air NZ sightseeing flight that crashed on Mt Erebus. Apart from that there are not a significant number of similarities between the two books. L'Engle's *Troubling a Star* (1994) also involves a tourist trip to Antarctica (via boat), but generally represents Antarctica as being for science, as mentioned in the preceding paragraph.

Antarctic Escapism

Longo's *Up to this Pointe* (2016) takes a unique approach amongst the books reviewed, and mainly represents Antarctica as a place where one can escape life, take a deep breath, and re-evaluate things. Both this book and *White Darkness* (McCaughrean, 2005) have main characters who hallucinate and communicate with past explorers, lending further weight to the notion of Antarctic escapism.

Antarctic Resources and Territorial Claims

In *Biggles Breaks the Silence* (Johns, 2014)¹¹, resources are treated somewhat differently than in any of the other books reviewed: there are seal-poachers, implying that Antarctic seals are protected, despite this being before the Convention for the Conservation of Antarctic Seals came into force. However, other resources (including whales) are still viewed as available for exploitation.

Contrasting this, *Troubling a Star* (L'Engle, 1994) and *And then Everything Unraveled* (Sturman, 2009) have a strong environmental focus. Both books

⁹ This has been categorised as a YA book due to the violence it depicts. However, the storyline is somewhat simpler than most YA books, and thus it is for a young YA or an old child.

¹⁰ The 2014 book is an anthology that includes *Biggles Breaks the Silence*, which was written in 1949

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emphasise protecting the Antarctic environment, and stopping resource extraction there.

Troubling a Star (L'Engle, 1994) also mentions the issue of Antarctic territorial claims – the only book reviewed to touch on this subject.

Conclusions

As you progress through the English-language juvenile Antarctic fiction from picture books to children's books to young adult books, the representations of Antarctica become both more complex and more realistic. This is unsurprising given the target audience for each category. It is worth noting that very few of the books portray Antarctica as a continent for both science and peace, which are the two stated goals of the Antarctic Treaty (AT). Furthermore, environmentalism (an important facet of the modern Antarctic Treaty System) is not significant in the majority of the books. It may be difficult to incorporate the concept of a continent for peace into a book, unless the plot deals with inter-country or interpersonal conflict. If these situations arise, the peaceful aspect of Antarctica could be worked into a book, should the author wish to. However, unless inter-country conflict is a major part of the story, it is unlikely to add anything to the story, and so would be omitted.

Obviously any books either written or set prior to the signing of the AT in 1959 will not reflect these modern values; these will necessarily represent Antarctica in a different light, reflecting the attitudes of former times. Given this, it is interesting to reflect on how the representation of Antarctica has changed through the years – books set in earlier times represent it as a harsh environment, for explorers and also for exploitation. As the decades pass, the representation moves to a continent for science and tourism, especially for the young adult fiction.

By necessity, this review is not comprehensive, as there is a significant quantity of juvenile literature both set in or mentioning Antarctica. However, it is hoped that the books reviewed here are representative of the wider range; it was attempted to acquire and read books from a variety of publication years, as often themes and depictions in novels reflect the thinking at the time they were written. It would be interesting to widen the range of books covered - there are still a significant number of juvenile fiction books that have not been read, and a review of a wider sample size would strengthen (or disprove) some of the conclusions drawn here. It would also be interesting to explore the representations of Antarctica in other languages, and to compare with the English-language depictions.

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